

TESTIMONY
GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATION
STEPHEN C. CULLINAN, SUPERINTENDENT ELLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOL
CHAIR, LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE, CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS
FEBRUARY 24, 2014

I am here today representing the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents as its Legislative Committee Chair and the Ellington Public Schools as its Superintendent of Schools. Written testimony from CAPSS Executive Director Joseph Cirasuolo has also been submitted to this committee. On behalf of the association and my district I thank you for allowing me to appear before you.

The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents recognizes the efforts that the Governor and legislature have made on behalf of public education over the past three years with a continued increase in funding that, quite frankly, has not occurred in many states across the nation. On behalf of the association and my district I wish to address four issues with you today.

First, The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents supports the Governor's recommendation for a second round of school security grants. We live in a world where school security, like emergency preparedness, is constantly evolving and will continue to demand not only on-going vigilance but continued resources. I believe that security for students and staff in our schools will and must remain a priority for many years to come. School security demands continued research, planning, preparation, training, practice and resources.

Second, although The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents appreciates the efforts to increase funding over the past few years, this effort has not been sufficient for districts to maintain buying power and thus the Association recommends an increase of 3% in the Education Cost Sharing Grant. I have the distinction of being the superintendent of the district with the lowest net per pupil expenditure in the State of Connecticut. Today, the state's share of funding for education in Ellington through the ECS has declined to approximately 30%. Amidst all of the mandates that we must fulfill, which do cost money, the Ellington taxpayer is assuming a larger percentage of a growing budget. The ever growing reliance on the local property tax to fund larger portions of school budgets cannot be sustained.

Third, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents also urges the state legislature to remove the cap on the special education Excess Cost Grant. My district has a special education identification rate of approximately 9.8%. However, approximately 20% of my budget is expended on behalf of the needs of special education students. Any shortfall in the funding of the Excess Cost Grant is born by my district. Although there are both federal and state mandates related to special education programming currently, the state can place a cap on Excess Cost Funding for special education while the district cannot as it must and should meet the identified needs of all of its students. In 2009-2010 the state cap on the Excess Cost resulted in a 12% reduction in reimbursement to my district. Each year that reduction has increased. This year I anticipate a reduction in Excess Cost reimbursement to Ellington of 29%.

Fourth, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents proposes that there be a moratorium on the opening of new magnet schools to allow the Connecticut State Department of Education time to develop a plan for magnet schools that includes 1) a strategy for improving student achievement, 2) a strategy to insure sustainability and 3) a uniform and equitable system statewide for funding. Several years ago my magnet school tuition bill was approximately \$20,000. This year it increased to \$280,000. Next year's cost may be in excess of \$400,000. The continued increases in magnet school tuition are becoming a significant burden for mine and other school districts across the state.

All of the above represent financial challenges that can only have negative consequences for the education of our students if appropriate financial assistance is not provided. I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.